

LEARNING CENTERS

The Chocolate Chips in the Instructional Cookie

What is a learning center?

An effective, appealing learning center will have several of these characteristics:

- The activity relates to, extends, or reinforces concepts, skills, and new information that have been taught.
- The activity provides practice for developmental skills.
- The activity appeals to the child's innate thirst to do, know, conquer, touch, see, and manipulate the real world.
- The activity allows for various learning styles and a wide range of abilities.
- The activity is noncompetitive, with low risk and moderate challenge.
- The activity encourages active, independent thinking, even when done cooperatively.
- The activity guarantees maximum learner time on task.

Why teach with learning centers?

Learning centers make sense, especially when one considers recent research findings about how children learn.

- Learning is enhanced through talking and doing.
- Learning is imbedded when it is personal, and when the learner feels some control over the learning.

- Learning is maximized when there is low stress and moderate challenge.
- Assessment is more realistic when the learner is observed using skills in an authentic context.
- Elements of fun, play, and socialization increase the chance that learning will be long term.

What centers are most appropriate for the Primary grades?

Use your own titles, labels, and designations, but include as many of these “stations” as you can in your room. The more choices you can offer, the more learning styles you can accommodate and the less crowded any one center needs to be at any given time.

Centers for reading, looking at books, listening to books, interacting with the printed word:

picture books	word cards/labels
books relevant to current themes	magazines
books on tape	books from home
classbooks	

Centers for language development:

puppets	flannel board
materials for walk-and-read	tape recorder

Centers for creating the written word:

stamps/ stamp pads	word cards
journals	lots of paper
personalized folders	alphabet chart
variety of writing instruments	typewriter

Centers for kinesthetic, tactile experience and manipulation of materials:

clay	woodworking
nuts, bolts, and screws	water, rice, sand table
gel bags	Legos
pegboards and pegs	lacing boards
pattern blocks	snap together beads
puzzles	counters
seashells	dollar store treasures

Centers for math and math explorations:

counters	geoboards
number stamps	Primary Bingo
dominoes	magnetic numbers
magnetic counters	bingo buttons
dice	

Centers for role-playing and pretending:

telephones	dolls
housekeeping items	career hats and tools
dress up clothes	blocks, large and small

Centers for art and creating:

lots of art supplies!	junk to glue on
stencils and tracers	scraps of felt, fabric
scissors	tracing paper
yarn, string	hole-punches
zig-zag scissors	clean up materials

Centers for science and exploring:

Materials relevant to current or seasonal themes:	
magnets	jacks
seashells	planting materials
rocks and minerals	scales
magnifying glasses	bottles of magic
sunflower head	seeds
chrysalis	fossils

What Factors Affect Decisions about Learning Centers?

Consider the physical layout of the room.

- What centers do I need to be permanent?

- What classroom areas are permanently structured?

- What classroom areas can be rearranged periodically?

- What areas can serve as home-base for multiple centers?

- What about traffic flow between centers?

Pertinent to my classroom:

Consider the daily schedule.

- Which blocks of time do I need for whole-group instruction?

- When do I have access to another adult(s) in my classroom?

- How much time must I allow for center cleanup, etc.?

Pertinent to my classroom:

Consider the curricular goals and objectives.

- How can I use centers to extend and enhance theme?

- How can I use centers to reinforce literacy all year long?

- How can I structure centers to provide remediation **and** enrichment?

- How can I assess student skills and achievement in centers?

- How can I assess the effectiveness of the center?

Pertinent to my classroom:

Consider the skills targeted for reinforcement.

- Which skills do I want to highlight year long?

- What are the developmental needs of my students?

- How can centers help refine skills?

- How much choice can I give the learners, and still achieve instructional goals?

- Can I balance “must –do” with “may-do” centers?

Pertinent to my classroom:

Consider your teaching and management styles.

- What noise levels are acceptable in my classroom?

- How self-directed do I expect my students to be?

- How do centers fit my level of organization?

- How will I deal with the students who misuse centers?

Pertinent to my classroom:

Sample Center Rotation Board

(once center routines are well established!)

Group	Jenna Kennedy Jamal Morris	Shaquille Leslie Ramona Shantae Trimara	Hannah Tobias Wendy Mikayla Vincent	Phelan Tommy Kenidee Julian	Stephen Rosanna Joshua Daniel Crystal
Day 1	Day 1 Center time is spent modeling the center activity, reading and practicing the center rules or procedures, learning set up and clean up of materials. As the year progresses, this takes less and less time.				
Day 2	1 2 3's	ABC'S	Investi- gations	The Author Center	FILE FOLDER GAMES
Day 3	FILE FOLDER GAMES	1 2 3's	ABC'S	Investi- gations	The Author Center
Day 4	The Author Center	FILE FOLDER GAMES	1 2 3's	ABC'S	Investi- gations
Day 5	Investi- gations	The Author Center	FILE FOLDER GAMES	1 2 3's	ABC'S
Day 6	ABC'S	Investi- gations	The Author Center	FILE FOLDER GAMES	1 2 3's

Use Velcro dots across top row for groups, and in Center title boxes. Print group names and Center titles on cards backed with Velcro tabs. Each day the group cards can rotate. After all children have completed all centers, the center titles can

be rearranged, and/or replaced with other centers. Having group cards and Center titles on different colored cards will help children locate and identify.

Sample Center Activities: To Get You Thinking Like *THEY* Do!

1 2 3's Center

This center would include any math related activities, explorations, and projects. At any point the center may include dice, dominoes, coins, skill sheets, measuring, etc. As skill levels strengthen, recording sheets may be an expected finished product at this center.

A B C's Center

This center, like the math center, will change as the year progresses, and skills improve. It may involve matching upper case to lower case letters, doing alphabet puzzles, stamping the alphabet, or matching picture cards to sound cards. As specific letters and sounds become the focus of instruction, the center will consist of phonics reinforcing activities.

Investigations Center

Children will explore, investigate, and take apart almost anything! This center may have a sunflower head from which the children pull seeds with tweezers; a tub of water and syringes, basters, and eye droppers; a floor map of the US with cars to drive across the country; an aquarium along with books, viewmasters, and nature magazines about tropical fish. Later in the year, the children can be assigned specific questions to answer at this center:

How many eye droppers of water does it take to fill the baby food jar? How many turkey basters does it take?

Write the names of the states you would drive through from New York to Virginia.

File Folder Games

In addition to file folder games, this center could include memory matching games. Teacher-made as well as commercially prepared games work well.

The Author Center (Illustrators, too!)

This center could be used to write in journals, create a page for a class book, write a note to a friend, or complete a drawing that will be scripted later.

Story Retelling Center

Leave out a recently completed read-aloud, and several other versions of the same story, if available. Children can retell the story to each other or alone using puppets, flannel board visuals, or the story on tape. There could be a sequencing sheet to complete, or children could complete and illustration.

Reading and Writing the Room

Provide sunglasses without the lenses, novelty pointers, and clipboards.

Architect Center

Legos, blocks, unifix cubes, etch-a-sketch, beads, linking stars, etc.

Keys to Smooth Centers!

1. Early in the year, introduce one or two centers at a time.
2. Don't start centers until classroom procedures are firmly established.
3. Early in the year, center time should be spent exploring materials before "assignments" are given in the centers.
4. Provide a balance of "finished product expected" and open-ended centers.
5. Practice procedures for reading the center board, getting out and cleaning up materials, where to put finished products, names on materials, etc.
6. Model, model, model!
7. Provide "always-open centers" for early finishers.
8. Establish expectations for quality of work, amount of time spent in a center, teamwork.
9. Center captains to set out and finish clean up.

10. Allow choices within a center.
11. Provide a catch-up cupboard.
12. Acquaint children with clean up signals.
13. Whenever possible, give a Two Minute Warning!

First Class Centers on a Coach Budget

Salad tongs and plastic eggs
Egg Cartons and plastic eggs
Soda/juice bottles, pom-poms and tweezers
Stringing and patterning beads, colored macaroni
Nuts, bolts, and screws
Water basters, eye droppers, nasal aspirators
Hole punchers
Viewmasters
Oversized push pins
Magnetic letters and numbers with cookie sheets
Paintsticks and clothespins
Take Apart Center
Touch and Feel Alphabet sheets
Teacher recorded books on tape
Pocket chart name, word, or sentence building
Floor maps
Dice, dominoes
Teacher made games
File folder games
Computer programs